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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/15/14
TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER MOPS IZ
SUBJECT: USEB 154: 1ST MARINE EXPEDITIONARY FORCE DISCUSSES
SITUATION IN AL ANBAR PROVINCE

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR RONALD NEUMANN FOR REASONS 1.4 (A) AND (D).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: PolMilCouns Ambassador Neumann and PolCouns Robert Ford, along with staff, traveled to Fallujah for a familiarization visit on 14 July, 2004 to meet with 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (1MEF) CG Conway, 1st Marine Division (MARDIV) CG Mattis, and Regimental Combat Team 1 (RCT-1) Col Toolan. The Marines presented the recent timeline of events in Fallujah from late March 2004, when Americans were murdered in the city and Marines were subsequently ordered in, through the present situation, characterized by an uneasy stand-off between the Coalition security forces and a collection of locals making up the Fallujah Brigade. They displayed a cautious sense of optimism about the growing internal divide between moderates and extremists within the city. 1MEF is focusing on accelerating a handover of security to local Iraqi control by 31 December and was aware of the necessary hurdles to overcome in order for that goal to be achieved. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (S) Commanding General 1st MARDIV Mattis and RCT-1 Commander Colonel Toolan briefed the timeline of events that took place in Fallujah from late March 2004 through the creation of the "Fallujah Brigade" to the present situation. They discussed the attacks on Americans on March 31, offensive operations by the Marines in early April, the negotiations with various local leaders and Governing Council representatives, and the present "wait and see" strategy-- essentially a middle ground between destruction and rebuilding. Fallujah remains a denied area to the Marines, and while the Marines are not undertaking offensive operations, they are also not at liberty to funnel civil/military funding to the city since they do not have freedom of movement. As a consequence, USD 27 million worth of projects remains on hold for Fallujah itself, whereas in the surrounding areas, such as Qarmah and Saqlawiyah, there are USD 13 million worth of projects ongoing. The 1st MARDIV hopes that this dichotomy will make Fallujans realize it is to their benefit to work constructively with Coalition forces.

¶3. (S) The Marines indicated they have a strong troop concentration in Fallujah's outlying areas, which has helped to stabilize the city's surrounding towns, whereas insurgents and foreign fighters largely operate without constraint within the city, where the Fallujah Brigade and other Iraqi security forces have failed to secure the city. Coalition forces are still seeking to disrupt insurgents and foreign jihadists with surgical strikes against Abu Mus'ab al Zarqawi-related targets within the town in order to prevent Fallujah from operating as a safe-haven for extremists. Marines viewed the Fallujah Brigade as having failed to provide security, but they did view the force as "buying time" for the Coalition forces to create a rift between moderates and extremists. 1MEF also appeared optimistic about new Iraqi security forces, indicating there is ever-increasing coordination between the Iraqi National Guard and the Iraqi police.

¶4. (S) Civil affairs officers attached to RCT-1 view their increasing contacts with area residents, the contracts they've awarded, and the compensation claims they honored to repair

homes and buildings after the April conflict as driving a wedge between moderates and extremists in Fallujah. These compensation payments have stopped due to the hardliners' control of the city. More Fallujans are realizing these benefits of Coalition presence and are edging away from extremists. Likewise, the release of prominent Fallujah imam Shaykh Jamal Shakir al-Nazzal and Albu Issa Shaykh Barakat Sa'dun al-Issawi have added voices of moderation in Fallujah and among insurgents since their release from Abu Ghurayb prison in April 2004. In the Marines' estimation, most Fallujah residents are growing weary of foreign fighters and Islamic extremists, and are tolerant of the recent surgical strikes against Zarqawi related targets. The U.S. military's Fallujah Liaison Center (FLC), located approximately 2.5 miles from Fallujah, in between the city and 1MEF/RCT-1 headquarters, is a neutral area that serves as the main point of interaction between Coalition forces and Fallujah citizens. The civil affairs team reported a large daily stream of businessmen, local shaykhs, Iraqi security forces, and average residents who come to bid for contracts, submit claims, or lodge complaints.

¶15. (C) 1MEF and 1st MARDIV reported that Fallujans and residents from Al Anbar still resent and often complain that they have no representation in the new Iraqi Interim Government and that Baghdad does not represent their interests -- a view similar to their estimation of the former Governing Council. Most Fallujah residents have little connection to Baghdad and appear more focused on local problems or contentions with local officials and tribes in Ramadi.

¶16. (S) 1MEF, which takes a strategic view of its AOR, Al Anbar and Northern Babil province, is looking towards transitioning to local control by 31 December, facilitating participation in the national elections in January, and achieving Iraqi self-governance in the Anbar governorate and in Northern Babil. They laid out a combined approach of security and stability operations, information operations, and civil affairs projects and activities in order to achieve this goal. Improvement of the Iraqi security forces is central to this purpose, and 1MEF has seen improvements in this area, with ISF becoming more receptive and taking on a more proactive role. Containing the border is also a key undertaking, however at this point only eight of the planned 32 border posts have been built.

¶17. (C) Comment: The Marines are looking to more closely meld the political and military processes, including coordination and decisions, as well as achieve closer contact with the IIG and the Embassy. The Marines said they would welcome monthly visits from the Embassy for further coordination. They also look forward to the assignment of a long-term Department of State embedded person, but caution that short duration TDYers are not sufficient to build understanding of the area. END COMMENT.

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